



**Balkan** 2023  
**Defence  
Monitor**

**Strategic  
Documents**



**BCSP**  
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# REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS



It must be underscored that even without the Ukraine war, adopting new strategies in the defence and national security domain has been a traditionally slow process for the Western Balkan countries, burdened with bureaucratic and political hurdles. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one the most extreme examples, as the country's last valid strategic documents remain the National Security Strategy of 2006 and the National Defence Strategy of 2008. This can largely be explained by the country's dysfunctional politics and complicated state apparatus. North Macedonia has not adopted a national security strategy since 2003, but it adopted a national defence strategy in 2020. Nevertheless, this also points to the lack of genuine strategic planning in the defence policies of individual countries, as defence policy is an extension of the wider rubric of national security policy. Compared to the previous year, none of the Western Balkan countries adopted new strategies, neither when it comes to national security strategy nor national defence strategy. This stands in stark contrast to the changes in the wider European and global security environment brought about by the Ukraine war.

As such, given that the old documents are still in force without new strategies being adopted, the official policies of the Western Balkan countries revolve around the familiar themes. As per old doctrinary documents, the military invasion continues to be defined as a possible but not probable security threat. Nationalism, separatism, economic instability, terrorism and organised crime are mostly defined as national security threats by all countries of the region in their extant documents. International peacekeeping and regional cooperation in emergencies are also major strategic goals in these documents.

The Euroatlantic agenda remains the dominant context of the extant strategic documents. The EU membership remains an important goal for all the countries in the region and important for each country's national security policy. In terms of NATO, NATO membership or the pursuit thereof is defined as a major element of each country's defence and security policy, with the exception of Serbia, which continues to uphold its policy of proclaimed military neutrality.

The war in Ukraine will almost certainly force the Western Balkan countries to draft and adopt new defence and security strategies in light of the dramatic changes in the European and global security environment. The first to do so will most likely be the countries that are members of NATO: Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia, as NATO adopted its own new strategic concept in 2022. As expected, Russia dominates the agenda in the context of its war against Ukraine; namely, in NATO's new 11-pages long document strategic document, Russia is mentioned 14 times. In contrast, China is mentioned only twice, once as a threat and second in the context of its partnership with Russia.

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1 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 29 June 2022, pp.1-11, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

2 The Republic of Croatia, National Security Strategy, 26 July 2017 p.7, <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/National-Security-Strategy-2017.pdf>

In the extent strategic document, Russia and China do not have a prominent place. The Croatian 2017 national security strategy does not mention China and Russia. There is only one mention of Ukraine in the context of the altered European security environment in the wake of the original Ukraine crisis of 2014. In Montenegro's 2018 national security strategy, Russia and China are not explicitly mentioned. Still, there is mention of hybrid threats and the fact that Montenegro has already been a target of these threats, a reference to Russia's involvement in the alleged 2016 coup. Russia and China are not mentioned in the Albanian national security strategy of 2014. The same goes for the North Macedonian national defence strategy of 2020, the country's most recent strategic document.

NATO's increased focus on Russia and security matters in wider Eastern Europe is highly likely to force NATO members in the Western Balkans to re-examine their national security strategies, leading to the adoption of new documents and policies. This will not be an easy task for most of these countries. Montenegro is engulfed in a constitutional and political crisis, where it remains unclear who the new president will be and which parties will form the new government. North Macedonia could also face political instability if nationalist parties strengthened by the failure of the country's advancement towards the EU make a comeback. Due to the lack of elemental political stability in these countries, it will not be possible to conduct a major national security policy debate, which will be sidelined to make room for more pressing matters.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the possibility of progress in adopting new strategies was a distant prospect even before the Ukraine war started. The country continues to be burdened by dysfunctional institutions and political and ethnic divisions. In light of the opposition from the Serbian entity, the Republika Srpska, NATO membership - a foreign policy goal defined by old and outdated strategic documents, is one of many issues around which there is no consensus in the country. Serbia will also face a challenge in re-adjusting its national security policy and strategic documents. The country is kept busy by its balancing act between Russia and the West, the unresolved Kosovo dispute, while domestically the ruling elite are faced with a combustible public opinion where Russia remains extremely popular and NATO extremely unpopular. This combination of factors makes it difficult for Serbia to re-adjust its policies and strategic documents.

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- 3 Republic of Montenegro, Strategija nacionalne bezbjednosti Crne Gore [National Security Strategy of Montenegro], December 2018, p.9, <https://zakoni.skupstina.me/zakoni/web/dokumenta/zakoni-i-drugi-akti/522/1814-11450-00-38-18-1-4.pdf>
  - 4 Republic of Albania, Strategija e Sigurisë Kombëtare [National Security Strategy], July 2014, <https://zakoni.skupstina.me/zakoni/web/dokumenta/zakoni-i-drugi-akti/522/1814-11450-00-38-18-1-4.pdf>
  - 5 Republic of North Macedonia -Ministry of Defence, Defence Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia, March 2020, <https://mod.gov.mk/storage/2021/06/Defence-Strategy-of-the-Republic-of-North-Macedonia.pdf>

## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2014

NO CHANGES IN 2022

## NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2015



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Protection and consolidation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Albania // Strengthening fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law // Protection and promotion of the interests of Albanians wherever they may be // Preservation and development of national identity



**Main threats:** Organised crime // Corrupt individuals // Terrorism // Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range weapons



**Main principles of national security policy:** Accountability and transparency // Activities of the Armed Forces based on the Constitution and subject to democratic control of competent institutions // Small, efficient and profiled force based on personnel rather than heavy weaponry // Promoting gender equality and increasing women's participation



**Regional cooperation:** Peace, stability and prosperity in the region are of strategic importance to Albania. Our interest is to have a region that is integrated into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, where inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony reigns. This will be realised through good neighbourly relations, cooperation in good faith, respect for minorities and inclusion. Relations between the countries of the region have improved, and cooperation has increased both qualitatively and quantitatively. Integration processes are catalysts for democratic reform, cooperation, good neighbouring relations and the reconciliation process. Promoting sustainable economic development will be achieved through deep regional economic integration aimed at creating an open and free regional market as a precondition for the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.



**Regional threats:** Problems in the region can still be caused by extreme nationalism. The existence of divided societies continues to pose a potential threat, due to the potential reopening of the border issue. Political exploitation and failure to exercise the rights of certain ethnic or minority groups could continue to cause sporadic tensions and generate negative consequences in bilateral and multilateral relations. Unresolved interstate disputes and problems can affect the quality of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, slowing down integration processes.



**NATO membership:** Membership in the North Atlantic Alliance is an inherent guarantee of national security, and the Republic of Albania is committed to fulfilling the obligations arising from said membership.



**Relations with the EU:** Albania's membership in the European Union is the country's most important strategic goal for the next decade. EU integration is also linked to the country's participation in the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.



**International military cooperation:** Albania is committed to actively promoting regional and global peace and stability, increasing its role in regional and international organisations, and to participating in missions led by the UN, NATO and the EU.

**NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2006**

**NO CHANGES IN 2022**

**NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2008**



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Protection and consolidation of National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Establishing and developing security system institutions that will be able to respond to all risks and threats // Accession to international security conventions, European and Euro-Atlantic structures



**Main threats:** Political and social animosities caused by the war and nationalist extremism // Incomplete implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement // Problems related to political transition // Critical regional points, such as Kosovo and Metohija



**Main principles of national security policy:** Democratic, civilian control of the military and parliamentary oversight // Transparency of defence-related activities, including defence planning and budgeting // Integration into Euro-Atlantic collective security structures



**Regional cooperation:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has no territorial claims involving neighbouring and other states, nor does it perceive neighbouring and other states as hostile and a possible threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, it is especially important that BiH further develops good neighbourly relations based on the principles of equality and cooperation. Improving good relations and cooperation with neighbours and countries in the wider region, the development of democratic processes in these countries, and the process of their European integration have a positive impact on strengthening the internal security of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



**Regional threats:** South-east remains the most sensitive area of today's Europe. Efforts toward secession, autonomy and independence of certain ethnic groups are still present in this area, which, together with the relatively high concentration of military capacities, further complicates the overall security situation.



**Relations with NATO:** The key element for achieving the unquestionable collective military security of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to become a member of NATO, as in that case its national sovereignty and territorial integrity would be guaranteed by the Alliance. Membership in the Partnership for Peace is the first step in that direction. Further reform in the field of defence, which will lead to full professionalisation, equipping and training the BiH Armed Forces in accordance with NATO standards, will enable BiH to make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of the Security Policy in the future.



**Relations with the EU:** The commitment to gradual integration into the European Union implies readiness to accept the provisions, legal structure and organisational mechanisms of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.



**International military cooperation:** As an active participant in collective security at the global level through membership in the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina is engaged in international peace efforts.

**NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2017**
**NO CHANGES IN 2022**
**NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2002**


**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Security of the population // Territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia // Strengthening the international reputation and influence of the Republic of Croatia // Ensuring the survival, protection of the identity and the political subjectivity of the Croatian people as constitutive in Bosnia and Herzegovina // Protection and support of Croats in other countries, and emigration



**Main threats:** Unresolved issues on delimitation with certain neighbouring countries // Political and intelligence activities of countries and non-state factors that perceive the European Union and NATO as a security threat // Terrorist attacks



**Main principles of the national security policy:** Parliamentary, professional and civil oversight of the legality of the work of the security and intelligence system // Inclusion of population in the civil protection system



**Regional cooperation:** The Republic of Croatia emphasises investing in the stability of the Southeast neighbourhood, viewing the Euro-Atlantic integration and the implementation of reforms as key factors and instruments for achieving stability and security. The Republic of Croatia will therefore systematically act in support of democratic processes, stabilisation, and access of countries in Southeast Europe to Euro-Atlantic integration. The Republic of Croatia will endeavour to seek a solution to the open issues of delimitation through direct negotiations or through proceedings before an international judicial body.



**Regional threats:** Political instability, underdeveloped state institutions, corruption, the high unemployment rate and social and ethnic tensions make the security situation in our Southeast neighbourhood fragile. Although Euro-Atlantic influence is still dominant, the space is also open to the influence of other global and regional actors and geopolitical competition and various destabilising external influences are reflected in this area as well. The Croatian neighbourhood shows trends of increasing intolerance, radicalism and extremism, especially Islamist radicalism.



**NATO membership:** For the Republic of Croatia, NATO is the guarantor of peace, stability and security. The membership of the Republic of Croatia in NATO provides a convincing guarantee of collective defence as an important factor in deterring and defending the population, territory, and national sovereignty. Appropriate military and civilian capabilities for deterrence and defence will be developed to carry out the tasks of the NATO Preparedness Action Plan as a contribution to the credibility of Allied solidarity and NATO cohesion.



**EU membership:** The Republic of Croatia will actively contribute to missions and operations within the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union and participate in the association and the sharing of initiatives and projects of the European Defence Agency.



**International military cooperation:** The Republic of Croatia will contribute to the efforts aimed at strengthening international security and stability by participating in international missions and operations, as well as crisis response operations of international organisations, in particular the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, OSCE, and the Council of Europe.



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Montenegro // Internal stability, protection of life and property of citizens and economic goods // Protection of democracy and rule of law, and guarantee and protection of human rights and freedoms



**Main threats:** Armed aggression // Terrorism and violent extremism // Proliferation of conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction // Cyber and hybrid threats // Organised crime



**Main principles of national security policy:** Development of military capacities and capabilities necessary for the execution of dedicated missions and tasks in the country and within the collective security system // Further development of military capabilities in line with the NATO defence planning process



**Regional cooperation:** The region generates a common vision of the future despite certain difficulties. Montenegro strives - through regional development cooperation and by enhancing transparency, dialogue and good neighbourly relations - to contribute to avoiding misunderstandings and improving security opportunities and stability in the region. Montenegro is committed to developing good neighbourly relations and strengthening regional co-operation, in terms of security as well as in other areas of common interest.



**Regional threats:** The region is still burdened by past events and unresolved issues that could cause destabilisation in certain areas. Geostrategic shifts have made the Western Balkans once again a zone of strong interest of certain international actors whose primary goal is to prevent the further European and Euro-Atlantic path of some countries in the region. This imposes concrete actions on the region, especially those of a hybrid nature, which poses a serious security challenge and can have significant consequences for regional stability and slow down the integration processes.



**NATO membership:** Montenegro has recognised that the best guarantee of long-term and sustainable security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state is access to the collective and cooperative security and defence system brought about by NATO membership. Therefore, active participation in the collective security system, NATO activities, missions and operations is a key prerequisite for protecting Montenegro from armed threats and other identified threats to national security.



**Relations with the EU:** NATO membership has significantly strengthened Montenegro's international position and facilitated the achievement of another key foreign policy goal - accession to the European Union. EU membership will further improve the security climate in the region and strengthen Montenegro's capacity to respond to current challenges, risks, and threats.



**International military cooperation:** Montenegro contributes to international stability through active participation in EU missions and UN peacekeeping missions and operations. Montenegro is developing its capacity to participate in NATO missions, operations and other activities in line with its membership obligations.

## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2003

NO CHANGES IN 2022

## NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2020



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Protection of independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Northern Macedonia // Strengthening regional security and stability // Membership in collective security systems // Effective management of natural disasters, technical and technological disasters, epidemics and climate change



**Main threats:** Insufficient economic growth // Corruption // Organised crime // Insufficient capacity and politicisation of democratic institutions // Foreign intelligence services delaying or hindering efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community // Radicalism and extremism // Terrorism // Illegal migration // Cyber threats



**Main principles of national security policy:** Collective defence // Professionalism and adequate and equitable representation of communities // Application of the principle of gender equality in all the phases of defence policy and planning



**Regional cooperation:** Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations have a positive impact on security in the region. Countries in the region are aware that co-operation and good neighbourly relations are a precondition for building mutual trust, integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures and improving regional security, stability and economic growth. The Republic of Northern Macedonia sees full membership of all countries of the region in NATO or the EU as the best way to further improve and consolidate the security situation in the region of Southeast Europe and beyond.



**Regional threats:** The region remains burdened by its history and continues to face problems that can lead to instability. Differences of national, ethno-religious and cultural character and conflicting goals and interests can be a challenge to the security and safety of the region.



**Relations with NATO and the EU:** Strategic commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration and membership in collective defence and security systems remain a top priority of our defence policy, focused on joining NATO and the EU. After full membership in NATO and the EU, we will fully participate in collective defence and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The military will maintain military capabilities which are compatible and interoperable with the NATO Code of Capabilities. It will also improve the existing capabilities and provide conditions for integration and adequate contribution of the national defence system to the collective defence of the Alliance.



**International military cooperation:** North Macedonia will develop strength and capabilities to participate in international peacekeeping and security operations and missions, in line with national security interests and international obligations. We will support regional and international peace, security and stability through active participation in NATO and EU-led operations and missions, as well as in international peacekeeping, humanitarian and observation operations led by the UN, and through participation in various forms of military cooperation at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.



## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2020

NO CHANGES IN 2022

## NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2020



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Preserving sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity // Preserving internal stability and security // Protection of the Serbian people wherever they live // Preserving peace and stability in the region and the world // European integration and membership in the European Union



**Main threats:** Separatist aspirations // Ethnic and religious extremism // Covert activities of foreign factors // Organised crime // Illegal migration



**Main principles of national security policy:** Democratic standards // Cooperation policy // European foreign policy orientation // Military neutrality // Developing the concept of total defence



**Regional cooperation:** Regional security is increasingly based on joint and coordinated activities in the field of security, politics and economy, other areas aimed at preserving stability and preventing crises in this region, and on the common interest of the region's countries to join the European Union. Activities within the framework of regional initiatives and the construction of joint mechanisms for the prevention of risks and threats, and for crisis management, create conditions for the accession of all countries in the region to the European Union.



**Regional threats:** Ethnic and religious alienation, and different interpretations and attempts to revise history, are creating limitations in the process of stabilising the region. Other factors that threaten regional security are non-military threats, including separatist aspirations and ethnic, religious and political extremism. The risk of outbreak of wars and other armed conflicts in Southeast Europe, although reduced, have not been eliminated.



**Relations with NATO:** The development of partnership cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and NATO, based on the policy of military neutrality and through the Partnership for Peace programme, contributes to the stability of the Republic of Serbia and contributes to bilateral relations with the countries of the region that are members of NATO. The Republic of Serbia does not intend to become a member of NATO or any other military-political alliance.



**Relations with the EU:** Improving national security and defence through the process of European integration contributes to the full membership of the Republic of Serbia in the European Union. (Serbia) is firmly committed to contributing to the European Union's Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy as part of the accession process and integrating into the concepts of that European policy.



**International military cooperation:** Through the participation of military and civilian capacities in multinational operations and missions of the United Nations, the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Republic of Serbia will improve its position as a reliable partner in international relations. Special attention will be paid to the trade in weapons and military equipment, because the suppression of illegal trade is a continuous commitment of the Republic of Serbia.



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